

**§ 143-214.15. Compensatory mitigation for diverse habitats.**

(a) The Department of Environmental Quality shall seek more net gains of aquatic resources through compensatory mitigation by increasing wetland establishment of diverse habitats, including emergent marsh habitat, shallow open water, and other forested and non-forested wetland habitats.

(b) The Department of Environmental Quality shall further establish with the district engineer of the Wilmington District of the United States Army Corps of Engineers compensatory mitigation credit ratios that incentivize the creation or establishment of diverse wetland habitats to support waterfowl and other wildlife.

(c) The Department of Environmental Quality shall work in cooperation with the Wildlife Resources Commission to ensure that all purchased mitigation lands or conservation easements on these lands maximize opportunities for public recreation, including hunting, and promote wildlife and biological diversity. The Department and the Commission shall pursue the voluntary involvement of third-party groups to leverage resources and ensure that there is no additional cost to private mitigation bankers or the taxpayers in achieving these mitigation credits.

(d) The Office of Land and Water Stewardship of the Department of Environmental Quality shall catalog an inventory of all its land holdings and determine how many of those holdings are potential wildlife habitats, either as currently held or with some modification. The Wildlife Resources Commission shall conduct a third-party review of this inventory, and the Commission and the Office of Land and Water Stewardship shall both report their findings to the Environmental Review Commission as part of the report required under subsection (f) of this section.

(e) If private individuals, corporations, or other nongovernmental entities wish to purchase any of the inventory of land suitable for wildlife habitat, then the Office of Land and Water Stewardship of the Department of Environmental Quality shall issue a request for proposal to all interested respondents for the purchase of the land, and the State shall accept a proposal and proceed to dispose of the land only if the Department determines that the proposal meets both of the following requirements:

- (1) The proposal provides for the maintenance in perpetuity of management measures listed in the original mitigation instrument or otherwise needed on an ongoing or periodic basis to maintain the functions of the mitigation site.
- (2) Where the functions of the mitigation site include provision of recreation or hunting opportunities to members of the general public, the proposal includes measures needed to continue that level of access.

The instrument conveying a property interest in a mitigation site shall be executed in the manner required by Article 16 of Chapter 146 of the General Statutes, and shall reflect the requirements of this subsection.

(f) The Department of Environmental Quality shall report to the Environmental Review Commission by March 1 of each year on its progress in complying with the provisions of this section. (2015-194, s. 2; 2015-241, s. 14.30(c).)